RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH GENE FRICKS

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Gene Fricks, on June 16, 2020, with Kate Rizzi. This is a part of the Class of 1970 Oral History Project. Thank you so much for joining with me today to do this oral history interview.

Gene Fricks: I'm glad to be here.

KR: To begin, where and when were you born?

GF: Knoxville, Tennessee, January 16, 1948. I've had that date now asked of me [laughter] since I was in the hospital at least five hundred times.

KR: Where did you grow up?

GF: Well, until I was about second grade, I grew up in Knoxville. In 1955, we moved to New Jersey because of the "Great Recession of 1955." So, I spent from 1955 until I graduated from high school in Jersey City. I really am more of a New Jerseyan in most ways [laughter] than someone from Tennessee, but I still have family there, so I still claim that as hometown. [Editor's Note: From 1953 to 1955, the American economy experienced a recession.]

KR: What was your childhood like in Tennessee?

GF: Oh, it was very pleasant. We lived in a city. Knoxville, except for downtown, then was not very well built up. It was all suburban style. It was a segregated city, as many were in that timeframe. You went outside the city, and it became rural very quickly. I had grandparents who lived in the northernmost part of the state, right on the Kentucky border. I had others who lived in the mountains of western North Carolina. One of my great grandmothers lived right outside the Eastern Cherokee reservation. She was a member of that community, and so they lived close to the rest of the [nation's land], they had cousins and friends and so forth. I got to go and visit every once in a while. I had an interesting experience, which may or may not be important in the formation of my life, but when I was about six years old, I was taken to the tribal council for a presentation. One of the elders there said, "He's half breed, no good." [laughter] I was summarily sent on my way.

KR: Gene, you said your great grandmother was Cherokee.

GF: Yes, was Cherokee.

KR: Tell me about your family history on that side of the family.

GF: Well, that's my father's side. The Fricks, I can track back reliably to 1358 in Switzerland. They came to America in about 1738, came ashore in Philadelphia, lived in Pennsylvania until I guess the 1760s, moved to the Carolinas, then eventually, after the Civil War, they moved to Tennessee. Western North Carolina and East Tennessee were Union territory, and as a consequence, the Fricks were Union. In fact, my great great grandfather, John Davis Fricks, served as a lieutenant in the Third Tennessee Cavalry, United States Volunteers. His father was a private in the same regiment. He died in a Confederate prison camp in Cahaba, Alabama in

1864. So, we've got that. Three of my four great grandmothers lived until I was about twelve years old, so I had lots of exposure to very old family stories and gained a tremendous appreciation for what all those people had gone through. Stories about the Civil War were as common as stories about World War II.

On my mother's side--and I know you didn't ask this, but I'll give it to you anyway--one of my provable ancestors goes back to William the Conqueror in 1066. He was a French knight who accompanied William at Hastings and for his services was given a grant upon the Welsh border. The old building, the castle, such as it is, is now just a big pile of stone, but it's still there. I have an ancestor who provably was acquainted with William Shakespeare, and it's an interesting kind of thing.

One of my great grandmothers, whose last name was Baird, B-A-I-R-D, tells the story that when she was a child, her great grandmother told of coming over from the old country. The old country was Virginia. That family that had been in America and started in New Jersey, since about 1705, and had come to Tennessee in about 1795 in the great resettlement from the more eastern, at that time, states.

KR: Your great grandmother on your father's side, what sorts of traditions were passed down from her Cherokee upbringing?

GF: Well, I'm not really sure. I didn't identify any great differences in what she believed in. I mean, she attended a Christian church. She was active in a community that was largely agricultural. I guess I didn't know enough, being only six or seven years old, in that one experience to really understand very much of what the traditions might have been. When I became much older, when I was working, I had a colleague, a fellow by the name of Jayhawk Collins, who was a full-blooded Cherokee, an absolutely brilliant-looking man, had the brown skin and everything. He could've done well on a poster, and he kind of introduced me to some of the things that I missed out by not having a close association with that part of my family. So, it's hard to be able to answer your question in any definitive kind of way.

KR: I am curious, did your great grandmother speak the language?

GF: She spoke some. Well, that's interesting, because most of the people on the reservation, as I understand it, were fully conversant in English because they used English with the community outside the reservation frequently. That was what they used. Jay, for example, spoke as good English as anybody that I'm aware of. He obviously could speak some of the native language, but it wasn't particularly used, at least in my experience, my observation, except for ceremonial occasions and things like that.

KR: You mentioned before Knoxville and segregation. What recollections do you have of Knoxville during the Jim Crow era when you were growing up?

GF: Well, there was one particular incident. I was, oh, six or seven years old, and two houses up from us was owned by a county judge, old Judge Channeberry. The judges there ran for reelection every year. So, he asked my mother and me if we would help him deliver a load of

watermelons to the black community, who lived two or three blocks away. They were having a picnic, a big outing. He was going to donate a dozen watermelons to this. Looking back on it, what they really engaged in was something that was very stereotypical. They were very appreciative of the fact that the judge donated the watermelons and then proceeded to have their picnic, but it was done in a very patronizing kind of way. He was doing it obviously to win votes. It wasn't anything that you would characterize as violent or negative or whatever, but it very definitely was, I thought, even at that time, that it was patronizing.

KR: What was your early schooling like?

GF: Well, I did the first two grades in Knoxville, and when we moved to the North, I spent a couple of months in Stratford, Connecticut with my grandparents, my mother's parents, and attended grammar school there. Then, in January, we moved to Jersey City, and so I began school there. It was interesting. I don't know if you're familiar with the mid-year promotion system that used to operate particularly in Jersey City and a lot of the other school systems in North Jersey. You could start, for example, the third grade, either in September or in January. I had gone through the second grade, and so they decided that they were going to put me into the third grade. My reading ability and so forth was on a par. The point is though that they skipped 3-A, which was the first semester, and they put me in 3-B. That always caused some interesting reactions, because I was always a year younger than all the other kids in school. When I got to be a senior in high school, I had to wait almost an extra year to get a driver's license. It also made a difference in the social interaction with the other gender because I was younger and that was a big deal. When I got to Rutgers, I did the five-year program and I caught back up with everybody.

KR: What did your parents do for their careers?

GF: Well, my father worked for Rohm and Haas, the large chemical and plastics manufacturer. They had a complex in Knoxville. My mother and father broke up when I was about six years old, six or seven, yes, about six years old, and my mother married a second time to an individual, my stepfather, who was an electrician. My mother was a professional artist, mostly in watercolors. She exhibited and had a small business selling paintings and such. That was their career, if you will, or careers.

KR: You said when your family moved to New Jersey in 1955, it was prompted by a recession. How exactly did the opportunity come about for your family to make that move to New Jersey?

GF: Well, my stepfather was a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the national electrical union, and a call had gone out through the union network that there were openings available in the New York City area. This was a period in the post-World War II era that New York was undergoing a massive transformation, tremendous investments in new buildings, in infrastructure and all these kinds of things, so that the construction industry was booming. As a contrast, in Tennessee, the great construction effort for the Oak Ridge complex had finally been completed. It wasn't until a few years later, when they started the Interstate Highway System, that there was a new infusion of economic activity, that Knoxville was able to regenerate some economic activity. But, by that time, we were in Jersey City. My stepfather

was working on a project in Manhattan. In fact, he spent eight years on that project. So, we were there, and things were rather better, having gone through a period of really difficult times during that year of recession. [Editor's Note: Oak Ridge is located twenty-fives miles from Knoxville, Tennessee. Originally a site of the Manhattan Project during World War II, the massive Oak Ridge government complex now consists of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the Y-12 National Security Complex, controlled by the Department of Energy in conjunction with several corporations.]

KR: Did your mother go through any type of training or education to be an artist?

GF: Yes, she did. She attended an art institute in Knoxville, and then when we came to New Jersey, there were opportunities as well. She didn't do university or anything like that, but she had an extensive art education and I guess it was realized or recognized because she was able to show her paintings, win awards, sell some of the paintings, and have at least a small income from that.

KR: What are your mother's and father's names for the record?

GF: Well, my mother was Barbara, maiden name was Clark, and my father was Ernest Eugene, Sr. My stepfather's name was Richard Griffey, E-Y.

KR: You talked about the military service of some of your ancestors. What was your father and your stepfather's military service?

GF: My father had served in the Army in the occupation of Germany after World War II. My stepfather had served in the Marine Corps. He enlisted shortly before Pearl Harbor and served in the Korean War. There was a very big identification with the military, and if you know anything about the culture of East Tennessee, that's a big piece of the culture there.

KR: What stories did your stepfather tell you about his World War II service?

GF: Well, they were, in most cases, funny stories, sometimes ironic stories. He carefully did not talk about some of the more unpleasant things that he had experienced and witnessed. I got the feeling, as I got older, that he really didn't want to talk about those kinds of things. He told me at one point, when I was at Rutgers, that if I joined the Marine Corps, he'd kill me. I had already signed up for the Air Force for ROTC and would much rather have done that anyway, but it was just an interesting kind of comment.

I came across some photographs that he had taken during the Battle for the Philippines. He had a couple of pictures of Philippine girls, and they were girlfriends that he had picked up there. There was one particular photograph that he had that was, I guess, somewhat shocking. It was from Guadalcanal. It was a picture of Japanese casualties, and they were everywhere. When he found out that I had found these, he carefully locked them back in--he had them in a suitcase and made sure that I couldn't find the key to get it open again. [laughter] [Editor's Note: During World War II, U.S. forces led by the Marine Corps invaded Japanese-held Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands on August 7, 1942. U.S. forces secured the island in February 1943, a decisive

victory in the island-hopping campaign of the Pacific War. In October 1944, American forces invaded the Philippines, a U.S. commonwealth taken over after Japanese forces invaded on December 8, 1941. The campaign for control of the Philippines involved a series of land battles and naval engagements during 1944-1945.]

KR: Did your father talk much about his service in the occupation of Germany?

GF: Yes, I would get photographs and letters and so forth. He actually was in Bavaria and in Austria, and he sent me a photograph of what was left of Berchtesgaden, which had been Hitler's holdout, and other scenes. He was a sightseer, and so he had gone around to the areas and had taken pictures and had lots of photographs from Salzburg and from Vienna, lots of the cultural places, which were in the process of trying to refurbish themselves. One of the things that became apparent is during the years of the Nazi occupation, there wasn't a whole lot of resources spent on keeping the city in a livable kind of fashion. [Editor's Note: *Kehlsteinhaus*, or Eagle's Nest, was a Nazi retreat in the mountains near Berchtesgaden, Germany.]

KR: How do you think you have been shaped by the culture of East Tennessee?

GF: Well, I'll give you an example. When I was doing my graduate program in Camden, one of the faculty members, who was from Western New York, made comments disparaging the mountain culture. I took him aside and asked what basis did he have for making these comments, did he have any personal experience of the area? He did not, and he was basically repeating stereotypes that he had learned from some of his graduate school professors, none of whom had any experience with the area. So, I guess I'm maybe a little more sensitive to people dealing in stereotypes without any factual basis than maybe other people would be. I've tried very hard throughout my career not to allow stereotypes to shape how I deal with people and the kinds of things that we do, the kinds of opportunities that we give one another, and just earn through personal relationships. [Editor's Note: Gene Fricks earned a master's degree in American history at Rutgers University in Camden.]

KR: After you moved to New Jersey, how often would you go visit Tennessee?

GF: Until I got to college, maybe once every year, once every two years. The opportunities really didn't present themselves very often. In fact, we got to Tennessee more for funerals than for any other purpose. Once I was in college, once I was in ROTC, I could get cut-rate train tickets because I was considered military and I could ride the train from New Brunswick to Knoxville for less than twenty dollars, which beat the airlines by a large amount. So, I did that, and it was an interesting experience to travel by myself in railroad equipment that probably dated back to the Civil War. [laughter] The railroads weren't doing well in the 1960s. Yes, it was not as frequently as perhaps I would have liked or maybe even would have benefitted from, but it was what it was.

KR: Before that, would you drive or take a train to Tennessee, when you were a kid?

GF: My folks would drive. I've driven the same route myself many times. It's now, with the interstate highways, it's almost exactly twelve hours. It's a much more pleasant ride than it was in the 1950s with lots of two-lane highways, and it wasn't Route 66. [laughter]

KR: What neighborhood did you live in, in Jersey City?

GF: Well, you're familiar with the city a little bit. Are you familiar with John F. Kennedy Boulevard and Duncan Avenue?

KR: Yes.

GF: Okay. We lived in an apartment house two doors down from that intersection. My grammar school was halfway down the block. If you remember anything about those blocks, they were very, very long. They had one block from the Boulevard down to West Side Avenue, one block from the Boulevard up to Bergen Avenue, and then you had Monticello Avenue beyond that.

I had a paper route for two years. All of my customers were from Monticello Avenue to West Side Avenue on both sides of the street, and I had 194 customers. The most interesting one lived in the big apartment house right on the corner of the Boulevard and Duncan Avenue, right across from St. Dominic Academy--it was a girl's school, a parochial high school for young women--but my most interesting customer was Charles Edison, the former governor, son of Thomas. [Editor's Note: Charles Edison (1890-1969), the son of inventor Thomas Edison, served as the governor of New Jersey from 1941 to 1944.]

I would collect every Friday for people for their subscriptions to the newspaper, *The Jersey Journal*. I can remember, I collected thirty-five cents a week from everybody who was a subscriber, and usually the subscriber might give me a nickel or a dime tip for the week. So, I would show up on the seventeenth floor at Mr. Edison's, and the maid would let me in. He would have me sat down in his study, and he would ask me about school and how I was doing and all. I guess my answers were acceptable because I got paid for the subscription and a dollar and a half for a tip. I mean, this was big money; it really was big money. I had to have thirty other customers to equal what he gave me. He was a fascinating guy, a fascinating character, and he didn't share any state secrets or anything, but he certainly made sure that I was keeping up with my homework and whatever.

So, they were interesting. My high school senior year English teacher lived on that same block. So, I would knock on her door every morning before I went to school and she went to school and hand her her newspaper. [laughter] Lincoln High School was about an eleven-block walk from Duncan Avenue, and there were a bunch of us who would walk together. There was no such thing as buses then, unless you caught a city bus, but we walked down, rain or shine, snow, whatever. That's just the way things were.

KR: What was that neighborhood like in terms of class and race and nationality and religion?

GF: It was a crossroads. I always thought that I had the best of most worlds because one side of the street, going down on the other side, were Italian. On the same side of the street, but up on the other corner, above the girl's school, it was Irish, and then next door to me and then around and then down the next street, it was Jewish. There was the low-rise hotel that fronted on the Boulevard there, which was owned by the Father Divine Organization from Newark, so we had, I guess you could call it a small black community there as well.

We all got along. I think everybody respected everybody else. I can't say that there was a great deal of socializing or interaction between some of the groups. It was always an interesting thing to me that the Irish and the Italians always seemed to be very standoffish to one other. I've subsequently experienced this with some of my other friends, and it's just something that stretched back, I thought, maybe a hundred years ago or more when their ancestors came to America. But each of the groups sort of kept to themselves.

I was the one who was the great traveler across the boundaries. A guy across the street, DeVito, I probably spent three nights a week at his house, had dinner; I had more Italian dinners and ate dinner more frequently at his house than I did at my house. Mrs. DeVito said, "Oh, you've got to eat," and she'd pile it on. Mrs. DeVito cooked for six or seven hours a day, magnificent food, a magnificent person. After I graduated from high school and Ezio, her son, graduated at the same time, it broke up this great relationship.

Yes, it was an interesting place. If you went up another block past Bergen Avenue to Monticello Avenue, then you had the beginning of a community that was largely African American. It was interesting at the time that there weren't very many Hispanic-surnamed individuals who lived in [the area] from Monticello Avenue down West Side Avenue and beyond. Most of them lived, as they said, "over the hill." I don't know if you're familiar with Ferris High School in the city. I mean, that was the neighborhood that that community sort of gravitated around. Of course then, there was Jersey City Heights and Dickinson High School, but we didn't talk about those people.

KR: What would you do for fun when you were growing up?

GF: Well, let's see, we had Lincoln Park that was down the street. I had a bicycle. One time, I decided to ride my bicycle down the Boulevard through Bayonne and over the Bayonne Bridge into Staten Island, and I turned around and rode back. If my mother had known that I'd done that, she probably would've skinned me. [laughter] In high school, I played football and other kinds of things. I hung out with the guys. On Wednesday nights, you could go up to the Jewish Y on Bergen Avenue and there would be four or five hundred high school kids all congregated from all over the city. You didn't have to be Jewish to congregate there. It was just a place, they had a big open area in front of the building, and they had the basketball games there and things like that in the building. So, we would do those kinds of things. By the way, your picture is fading.

KR: Can you hear me okay?

GF: Yes.

KR: Okay. For the record, what are the names of your siblings, and when were they born?

GF: My siblings, well, I had a brother, Terry, who was born in 1950, and then a brother, Richard, who was born in 1966. Then, my father had a second family, and we remain close. He had four children in that second family. There was Sabrina, who was--she's what?--I think ten years younger than I am, so that would be 1958; Suzanne, who was 1960. Bart was one day older than my daughter, my oldest daughter, and then Lizzie, who was the youngest sister, was born in about 1968 or '69. Lizzie unfortunately passed away here about a year ago. She has a daughter who's going to Tennessee Wesleyan University on full scholarship.

KR: How close were you and your brother Terry when you were growing up?

GF: We were pretty close. We did the usual sibling fighting and whatever. I guess it was only after we became adults that we began to appreciate one another. [laughter] He became a police officer, a juvenile delinquent who grew up to be a cop. After he retired from the police force in Middlesex County, he became a security officer for the Trump organization in Atlantic City and has had numerous instances to observe Mr. Trump, who he thought was one of the crazier Cucamongas he'd ever encountered. [laughter] He said, "This guy ought to be locked up." [laughter]

He told the story--I'll tell one out of school here--I don't know if you remember, but three of Trump's associates were killed in a helicopter accident flying from Atlantic City out of the city going to a meeting, and the helicopter crashed off the coast of New Jersey. Donald was supposed to have been on that flight but didn't get out of bed in time enough to make it, so they took off because they had people to meet. He narrowly avoided being killed. My brother had tried to hold the helicopter for him and then discovered that he hadn't even gotten up, so they said they were going to go. Things could've been very, very different. [Editor's Note: On October 10, 1989, three executives of Donald Trump's casinos in Atlantic City died in a helicopter crash near the Garden State Parkway in Lacey Township, New Jersey. The two pilots were also killed in the crash.]

KR: What schools did you go to in Jersey City before Lincoln High School?

GF: Number 17 School, Number 34 School, out in Greenville, and Number 11 School, up on Bergen Avenue and right off of Journal Square.

KR: What were your academic interests early on in school?

GF: Believe it or not, history, literature. I was an average, so-so mathematics person. Very definitely, as an example of that, one of the schools that I applied to for college was Columbia, and while I was visiting Columbia as a junior, I happened to get a catalog. I was looking through the offerings, and I turned to the English literature section. They had a list of about thirty courses that were offered and named all of the authors who would be covered in the courses. So, I decided to pick one author from each course and get one of their works and read all thirty of them, kind of, if you will, a survey of English literature. I was successful in doing that. When I was a senior, I was called in for an interview by the admissions department, and I dragged out

my list and all. I have to say that was probably the only thing that I did that impressed them. [laughter] It was just an interesting kind of thing, but it was a great introduction. I still do crazy things like make references, very vague allusions to things that I read in some of these things over time, and I discover that almost nobody else has read most of this stuff.

KR: You were at Lincoln High School from 1961 to 1965.

GF: Right.

KR: You said you played football. Tell me a little bit more about football and other activities that you did.

GF: Well, I played football for basically four years. I made varsity as a junior. Junior year, we competed for the county championship, the Hudson County Championship. When I was a senior, I got hurt. They thought I had broken my wrist. As it was, I had sprung a couple ligaments in my wrist, and it made things a little difficult to play in that condition. We played Bayonne High School right at the end of the season in a blowing snowstorm, but it was great fun.

A couple of the guys that I played with are still around. Most of them live in the Jersey Shore area. We did a forty-five-year high school reunion five years ago, and some of the guys and their wives showed up. It's remarkable the number of guys who ended up marrying classmates. I would not have expected anything more than an incidental sprinkling of that kind of thing, but it really was. It was interesting also to see what these guys had done in life after they had finished what we had done. I was the only one--no, I take that back, there was another guy--we were the only two senior football players who finished college. Four or five of the guys got scholarships to play at various places. I didn't, and the other guy didn't. He went to Duke. We were the only two to finish. We had guys who were drafted. There were guys who enlisted in the services, mostly to avoid being drafted. From there, their lives went into business and whatever.

Other activities, I wrote for the school newspaper and eventually became the sports editor in my junior year. We put out six issues of the newspaper in my senior year. Considering the technology of the times, it was really quite impressive. I was the sports editor for the yearbook. Everybody else wanted to be editor of the yearbook, and I said, "I don't want to be editor of the yearbook. Let me take my little piece. I know what I want to do." So, they said, "Wow, okay. You can do that." So, there I was. We had a Latin Club. I did four years of Latin, and we had a Latin Club. I was an officer. I served on student council for one year, and I think there was some other things like that.

We had a powderpuff football game in the gym, a basketball-court type gym, and all the football players were the cheerleaders and some of the other ladies. So, the guys from the football team dressed up in the cheerleader outfits. I was the coach of the senior girls' team, and then we had somebody else who was the coach of the junior girls' team. Well, this is a big deal. I mean, it actually got press coverage in *The Jersey Journal*, wow, and we didn't get anybody too badly hurt. The girls discovered what playing football was really like. There were a lot of bruises and sore muscles and whatever. We did it as a charity thing, and we filled the gym. We had a couple of hundred people who paid money to see this.

KR: Are there any teachers that stand out in your mind from high school?

GF: Oh, yes, oh, yes. My Latin teacher, Jim McKenna, I had him for four years. He was an interesting guy because before he became a Latin teacher, he was a jazz musician and knew and was an intimate of Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, knew Ozzie Nelson. Those guys all started their careers in Jersey City and North Bergen. They may have started as maybe not quite high school groups, high school bands, but something along that line. [Editor's Note: Jimmy Dorsey was a band leader, jazz clarinetist and saxophonist during the big band era. His younger brother, Tommy Dorsey, was a jazz trombonist and band leader. Ozzie Nelson graduated from Rutgers College in 1927 and Rutgers-Newark School of Law in 1930. With a background during his college days of being a musician and band leader, Ozzie Nelson turned to a career in entertainment. He hired Harriet Hilliard as a singer in his band, and they got married in 1934. They starred in the radio show *Ozzie and Harriet Show* and the television series *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*.]

There was Miss Sullivan, who taught my senior year in English. She was really fantastic, but the one [who was the] most memorable was Miss Sutton, my junior year English teacher. "Bloody Mary Sutton" she was called. [laughter] She would have done well at Rutgers. I don't think Tom Edwards was there in New Brunswick still in your timeframe. Edwards taught James Joyce and we learned Joyce, but she would have given Tom Edwards a run for his money. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Thomas R. Edwards, Jr. served as an English professor at Rutgers from 1964 to 1993.]

I had Saul Feith, F-E-I-T-H, a math teacher. He tried desperately in my senior year to teach me calculus. I just wanted to graduate [laughter] and get out of all of that, at least for a while, decompress or something. There were other teachers who were memorable in one fashion or another. I'm not sure I can remember their names, although the yearbook is in the bookcase over here about ten feet away from me. Yes, I was very definitely influenced by a number of those folks.

It was interesting because Miss Sullivan wanted me to attend Columbia, which is where she had gone to school, and so she wrote a glowing letter of recommendation and kept pushing me in that direction. My guidance counselor was pushing me to apply to Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, because that was his alma mater. He said, "Oh, you're just the right kind of student for the law school at Dalhousie." I actually applied. It was difficult for a student from the lower states to gain admission into a Canadian university, particularly as an undergrad. They accepted me, didn't offer any scholarship or anything to make things work, but they accepted me. In fact, I got accepted in all the schools that I applied to, but Rutgers was the only one I could afford. [laughter] My grandfather wanted me to go to Georgia Tech and become an engineer because that was his background. Nobody ever pushed me to go to apply to the University of Tennessee, which would've been an interesting situation. Of course, Rutgers was close by and achievable, and in retrospect, I probably was better off going there than any place else I might've gone.

KR: Before we get into your Rutgers years, I want to ask you, what historical events impacted you or stick out in your mind from when you were growing up?

GF: My first experience with television was the McCarthy hearings. My folks had just bought their first television set at the time the hearings were becoming a major national event. I sat here glued to the television set every evening while this stuff was going on, and I came to the conclusion that this guy Joe McCarthy was a very bad man. [laughter] So, that was, what, 1954 or '55, so I wasn't obviously well attuned to all of what was going on, but he just impressed me as being a very bad, belligerent guy. [Editor's Note: In 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy's claims that Communists had infiltrated the State Department sparked a Red Scare. The witch hunts of the McCarthy era relied on innuendo and unfounded accusations, tactics that earned the ire of President Dwight D. Eisenhower after McCarthy alleged that Communist spies were operating at the Army's Fort Monmouth. When McCarthy launched an investigation of the Army in 1953, the Senate countered with an investigation of McCarthy. The televised Army-McCarthy hearings in the summer of 1954 exposed McCarthy's unscrupulous fear-mongering. Soon after, the Senate censured McCarthy, and he died from complications related to alcoholism in 1957.]

Of course, the assassination of John Kennedy made a big impact on all of us. Dr. King's March on Washington was a major event because some of us actually booked a bus and went to the march. I, every so often, will show a photograph that was taken from the helicopter of the crowd down on the Washington Mall. I will point over to one corner there and I say, "See, you can see me right there, see, see." Of course, all it is is just a mass of color and you know that there are people there, but you can't see anybody. That speech was one of the most soul stirring and impressive things that I've ever experienced. I came away with a tremendous admiration for the guy and what he was trying to do. Let's see, what else? There have been all kinds of things, yes, ma'am. [Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas. The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom occurred on August 28, 1963. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered the "I Have a Dream" speech at the event.]

KR: Gene, that was a school trip that went to the March on Washington in 1963.

GF: It was a trip that we, the students, organized. It was not a sanctioned school trip. We pooled our money. We rented a bus and packed it with people, and I went down there. It turned out a couple members of the faculty went along with us because they thought that it was important too.

I got in trouble in 1964. This is not a major historical event, but I had a girlfriend who was very much involved in the Young Americans for Freedom, which is a movement and group you're probably not familiar with, but it was very, very Goldwater influenced. One day, during the presidential campaign in '64, we took the day off to go up to Journal Square and hand out Goldwater election paraphernalia to the people coming up and down through the PATH system. The local police picked us up, and so we were now adjudged truants and we each got two weeks. We had to stay behind every afternoon at school. [laughter] Of course, in Jersey City, Goldwater and Republicanism was not popular. That was very much a Democratic establishment location. [Editor's Note: Young Americans for Freedom is a conservative student organization that was established in 1960 at the Connecticut estate of the wealthy journalist and right-wing commentator William F. Buckley, Jr. In 1964, the group played a role in the Republican presidential nomination of Barry Goldwater over the more moderate Nelson Rockefeller.

Goldwater, who served as a U.S. Senator from Arizona from 1953 to 1965 and again from 1969 to 1987, lost in the general election to Lyndon B. Johnson.]

KR: At that point, when you were in late high school, what were your political beliefs?

GF: I'm not sure that they were well formed. I mean, there was only one party line, which was the local Democratic thing. Republicans in Jersey City were about as rare and extinct a species as they are here in Camden County now. What you knew and what you were exposed to was the old Hague regime, the Kenny regime, Tom Whelan. [Editor's Note: Frank Hague was the leader of the Democratic political machine in Hudson County and mayor of Jersey City from 1917 to 1947. John V. Kenny, who took control of Democratic politics from Hague, served as the mayor of Jersey City from 1949 to 1953. Thomas J. Whelan served as the mayor of Jersey City from 1963 to 1971, during which time he was convicted of collecting kickbacks from contractors. Kenny was implicated and convicted in the same scheme.]

During my junior-senior year summer, I attended Jersey Boys State, which was, at that time, held on the campus in New Brunswick. In fact, I had a chance to live in a River Dorm for two weeks, which was an experience that told me I didn't want to live in a River Dorm when I got to school there. [laughter] But the guy who sponsored me for Boys State was the U.S. Senator from New Jersey, Harrison Williams, later who was indicted and sent to prison as a result of ABSCAM. After I came back from my week and a half in New Brunswick, he offered me a summer job in his office. His office was actually in Bayonne, but it was right on the border. I got to see how politics was really played in Jersey City and in Hudson County and whatever. Let me tell you, it was pretty seamy. So, that's a long answer to what was your very short question, but that kind of shaped my view in some ways of political parties and political processes. [Editor's Note: The River Dorms on the College Avenue Campus of Rutgers University include Frelinghuysen, Campbell and Hardenbergh Halls. Boys State and Girls State are summer mock government programs operated by the American Legion. ABSCAM refers to the controversial FBI sting investigation into political corruption that led to the conviction of a number of federal and state officials, including Harrison "Pete" Williams. Williams represented New Jersey in the House of Representatives from 1953 to 1957 and then served in the U.S. Senate from 1959 until his resignation in 1982, after he was convicted of bribery and conspiracy stemming from the ABSCAM investigation. He served two years in federal prison.]

KR: Do you have any anecdotes from your time working in the senator's office?

GF: There were people constantly coming in and out of the office, most of them with large manila envelopes. I was told, "Just take the envelop, make a note of who dropped it off, and then put it into his office." He had a special desk, where you put the envelope into a slot. It kind of disappeared into the desk. I was enjoined never to open one of the envelopes, and I didn't. [laughter]

KR: You talked about going to the March on Washington. What other activism were you engaged in when you were in high school?

GF: I ran for student council and I was elected. I mean, that's not Martin Luther King-level of activities. In our senior year, two of my friends ran for president of student council. The friend who I favored and supported decided midway through the campaign to say, "I'm not going to campaign anymore," and he basically abdicated. So, I went out and put up posters and other kinds of things just to keep his candidacy alive. He gave a speech and said, "He did it. I didn't do it. I said I wasn't going to campaign." So, that pretty well scotched his campaign bid. In terms of activism, other than the Goldwater stuff handout--which I only did because Sandy Gallo was doing it, and I was playing accompanist or consort or something, and I was more interested in taking her out than I was in handing out literature--I think that was probably pretty much the extent of it.

KR: When you were at Rutgers, Barry Goldwater actually came and was a speaker. Did you happen to see him?

GF: I guess I didn't. Do you recall what year?

KR: I do not. I think he spoke in the Barn, the College Avenue Gym. I can check my notes, so I will look through them as we are talking. I do not actually recall the year.

GF: Okay, I don't recall him coming to the campus. The one who I do recall was Gene Genovese. Are you familiar with Genovese's name? [Editor's Note: Eugene Genovese (1930-2012), a scholar of slavery and the American South, served as a history professor at Rutgers from 1963 to 1967. There were a series of teach-ins at Rutgers in 1965, first in April and then in October. On April 23, 1965, at a teach-in at Scott Hall dedicated to discussing U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam, Genovese declared, "Those of you who know me know that I am a Marxist and a Socialist. Therefore, unlike most of my distinguished colleagues here this morning, I do not fear or regret the impending Viet Cong victory in Vietnam. I welcome it." Amidst the firestorm of controversy that ensued, Rutgers President Mason Gross, with the support of the faculty, resisted public pressure to dismiss Genovese and staunchly defended the principle of academic freedom. Genovese later resigned and moved to Canada, where he taught at Sir George Williams University.]

KR: Yes. What do you recall?

GF: Well, he staged his famous sit-in. They had us all sitting on the steps there leading up to the dining hall, and I was up on about step number eight or nine, up toward the top. We had a huge crowd, people standing on the top, looking over and all. He was a pretty dynamic speaker and it was interesting to be in his company, yes.

I later had an opportunity to take a course with him, before he decided to leave the university and go up to Canada. In fact, I had told him about my Dalhousie experience. [laughter] He said, and I think he was thinking of leaving even when I had that conversation, because he said, "Well, you probably would have been better off."

I don't recall doing too many other of those kinds of things. It got to be a real grind doing coursework for school. I was carrying twenty-one, twenty-two credits a semester. That's five or

six courses, and that really limited my involvement. Until I got to be a senior, it really limited my involved in a lot of outside activities that I might have been interested in. Things began to back off a little bit in terms of intensity and stress levels.

KR: What do you remember about the controversy with Eugene Genovese, the controversy around what he said and academic freedom?

GF: It was all over the place. What I do remember, and I learned this because of someone who was working as an intern in Mason Gross's office, that Richard Hughes, the governor, after the controversy had died down a little bit, gave Gross an order to get rid of that guy. So, it became very obvious that things were made unpleasant for Genovese, and so he finally decided he was going to leave. A lot of people who were very vocal about academic freedom and all were really very two-faced about this, and there was a lot of that sort of thing going on. [Editor's Note: Richard Hughes served as the governor of New Jersey from 1962 to 1970. Mason Gross held the post of president of Rutgers University from 1959 to 1971. The controversy over Genovese's statements became an issue in the gubernatorial election in 1965 between Hughes and Wayne Dumont, who called for Genovese's dismissal.]

When we get to talk about May of 1970, I have a couple of instances that I don't think most people are familiar with. During that time period, one of the things that I did, I had an intern job working in the alumni office. There were people who worked very assiduously to undermine Mason Gross.

KR: We will delve into that. That is really interesting. You had Eugene Genovese as a professor.

GF: Yes.

KR: What was that class like? What was he like as a professor?

GF: I thought he was very approachable, very agreeable. You could disagree with him and he would listen. He may not agree with you, but he would listen. He was really pretty fair about that, which is more than I can say for some of his colleagues, but, no, I thought he was okay.

When I was at Camden [in graduate school], I had an opportunity to teach one class in one of the courses I was taking, and I used *Roll, Jordan, Roll* to illustrate what I was talking about. I pointed out to everybody that the book is, at that time, I guess about, thirty years old, I said, "You've got to understand its limitations, both in technique and in its data coverage." I said, "This was, in many ways, one of the first efforts to understand a particular culture, and this was all new to most people in the United States." It was really a groundbreaking piece of work. Stuff has come along later that's better and more extensive and corrected some of the things that Genovese didn't get quite right, but that's the nature of scholarship. [Editor's Note: *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* is a 1976 book by Eugene Genovese.]

KR: Did you have any other history professors at Rutgers?

GF: Dr. Peter Charanis, let's see, Don Weinstein, Richard McCormick, Joe Held, who became a dean down in Camden eventually, unfortunately, Warren Susman. Let's see, who else? I actually took two courses, two courses or three courses, with Charanis. In fact, he talked to me at one time about going to Harvard to graduate school, since I was the only one who expressed any interest in trying to learn Greek. He taught Byzantine history, and you really needed to be able to handle Greek if you were going to do that. He was a great guy, a funny guy. It was a real joy to do his work.

Another guy like him was Dr. Donald McGinn, who taught Shakespeare, interesting story. If you wanted to get an "A" in McGinn's course, you had to memorize a part from one of the plays and get up and declaim. The best you could do without getting up was a "B". So, one of the basketball players and I decided to do *Romeo and Juliet*, the famous, "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" He, my partner, was going to do the Juliet part with a pronounced Brooklyn accent. So, we start off--and these are big lecture classes, two, three hundred people--before we were over, we had Dr. McGinn, we had most of the people in class on the floor laughing so hard. [laughter] Well, we both aced the course, which was the objective. "Go ahead, laugh at me, but give me an 'A'." [laughter] That was funny. Then, when we came and signed up for the second semester of the course, I guess McGinn thought that we were both crazy. [laughter] But he had a special spot in his heart for athletes because he knew that it was tough to go to school and play sports. So, I often thought that we kind of got a little bit of extra consideration. Certainly if the paper wasn't handed in on just quite the day it was due, but you got it into him two to three days later, eh, it's okay.

KR: You played a sport at Rutgers.

GF: I started out with lightweight football. Then, when academics got to be too big a deal, I had to terminate that. There weren't enough hours in the day to do all that. You get finished with an afternoon practice and then you didn't feel like you wanted to do your homework. It didn't take long doing that sort of thing to get into a situation where you're going to flunk out. Nobody wanted to flunk.

I joined a fraternity on campus, and it was kind of an interesting issue because it was a place to live, a place to have a little bit of sociability, a place to at least give yourself kind of your own space so that you could go to school. I had a guy who, I guess it was his junior year, and he gave up and he played cards for five days during exam week and he flunked all four courses he was taking because he either didn't take final exams or he didn't do well. The draft board, which was located on George Street, came looking because the university was very good about getting the names of students who had failed to the draft board within a day or two. He went down to the enlistment station, which was located on the same block, and enlisted in the Air Force. Not flunking out was kind of important.

KR: What were your first days and weeks like at Rutgers in 1965?

GF: A whirlwind, literally, a whirlwind. At least I was familiar with the New Brunswick campus; not familiar very much at all with the Piscataway campus. I didn't have any use to go over to what became Cook-Douglass. I went to Douglass once for a social event and they ran

some kind of a gathering or dance or whatever for all the incoming freshmen, and that was like within the first week. After that, I had no occasion to go over to that part of New Brunswick probably for two years, and no opportunity or reason at all to the Ag School ever.

It was really, really intense. It was the famous thing that we sat here at convocation on day three and, "Look to the left and look to the right. At the end of the year, two of you won't be here." It seemed almost as if the administration went out of its way to ensure that that happened. I'm not sure if it was due to the fact that they didn't have enough places to put everybody or whatever, but they made it grueling. For somebody who had come from a big city high school, an inner-city high school, the difference in preparation really began to show pretty quickly.

KR: Where did you live initially?

GF: Well, initially, my folks had moved to Old Bridge in Middlesex County, and then so I was commuting from Old Bridge up. Then, I moved up to New Brunswick and lived in that area for the rest of my school career.

KR: Where did you live? Did you live in dorms and then the fraternity house?

GF: I never actually lived in a dorm. Dorms were too noisy. I had a place there, a one room. I call it an apartment; it was one room. Then, we had a fraternity house for one year. The frat house was equally noisy. The guy that I lived with was a musician, a music student, he was in a band and whatever. He had this habit, he wanted to play records, and I couldn't do that and concentrate. You know, when you're doing physics and chemistry and calculus all at one time, concentration is really important. Then, add in English and German and what else, you've got a prescription for disaster if you can't concentrate. So, I just kind of tried to separate myself from most everybody else. [Editor's Note: The Gamma Sigma chapter of Tau Epsilon Phi was located at 19 Union Street.]

KR: You were basically a double major in engineering and history, correct?

GF: Right, a dual-degree program.

KR: What influenced your decision to do that type of course of study?

GF: Well, I think it was a fail-safe consideration. I thought that I probably could do well enough to graduate if I had history. I wasn't at all sure that I might be successful in the engineering, and as I advanced through freshman year, I guess my confidence level slipped pretty considerably. So, I was glad that I had the fallback. The history program, actually, it was the liberal arts program if you remember, everybody had to take this package of general liberal arts courses as preparation for doing bigger and better things, but that's the thing that saved me and kept me in school because if it had been just my physics and chemistry grades, I probably would've been given the gate. I actually went to the TA [teaching assistant] in my chemistry course and made a solemn vow that I would never take another chemistry course as long as I lived if he would give me a "C" in the course because I was destined for a "D" or an "F". In fact, he did, and until I got to graduate school at Penn State, I lived up to that vow. I took a chemical

engineering course and I aced it, which I'm sure would have surprised all those people back in New Brunswick.

It was funny because in my freshman year, I just barely got by, because I did well in English and did well in Western Civ and that sort of thing. By the time I got to be in my last year, I was dean's list. Some of it I think was maturity, growing up, and some of it was a much better ability to handle what I was into. Maybe that's all part of growing up too, but I was much more confident. I was much better at doing what needed to be done.

KR: You did Air Force ROTC. Why?

GF: Well, ever since I was a little kid, I had a fascination with airplanes, and I wanted to do that. There was this strong family sense of service, which I guess influenced me to a certain degree. I mean, that was the two major considerations in that. As I told you earlier, my stepdad said that if I had joined the Marine Corps, he'd killed me, and I think he really meant it. [laughter]

I had two very close friends in high school who were sent to Southeast Asia--actually three, one was in the Navy--they never came home. When the Wall was built down on the Washington Mall, that big green monument, I went to find their names on it, and I realized that I could never go back to this place again. It wasn't possible. One of the guys, I had been the best man at his wedding. This really hit me very hard. So, yes, I wasn't willing to do that service. I respected guys who did, but the Air Force was the way to go. It's what I did. [Editor's Note: The Wall refers to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., which was dedicated on November 13, 1982. The memorial lists the names of the over 58,000 Americans who died in the Vietnam War.]

KR: I want to go into your Air Force ROTC career at Rutgers, but first I want to ask you, when you were a freshman and sophomore at Rutgers, 1965-1966, what were discussions going on between you and your friends, your classmates about the Vietnam War and what was going on?

GF: There weren't many. There weren't many. It was not something, certainly in '65, it was not something that was a hot topic of conversation. '66, it became a little bit more of an issue. It was kind of the thing that it built over time. We had guys who were very gung-ho and couldn't wait to graduate and be involved. You have others whose only reason for being ROTC was to solidify their deferment from the draft. So, you had all kinds of different reasons, but there wasn't a lot of ideology that was associated with this, at least in my recollection.

KR: As the war was escalating and the antiwar movement was growing, as we are getting later on in the 1960s and through your Rutgers career, what did you think about the war?

GF: Well, I guess I had mixed feelings. I bought the idea that if the North Vietnamese had been successful in conquering the south, that this very likely would mean a domination of all of Indochina and Southeast Asia. The holdover from World War II, the takeover of Eastern Europe, the effects of the Korean War still were very vivid for most of us. Now, a lot of us could see there was something very similar happening, and people talked about, well, you know, once Indochina, then Australia could be next, or India could be next. If we had understood

Vietnamese history and sociology much better, I think we would have concluded that this probably would not have happened. Much of this was political propaganda that was used in the '64 presidential campaign to drub Lyndon B. Johnson. As a consequence, we're listening to what in some ways was a very one-sided story, which in '64 and '65, the media was very much in tune with. It was only later that they began to experience misgivings and differences in their outlook. Certainly, in the beginning, this was very much the operative story. It was a tremendous missed opportunity.

I have a good friend who lives in Gloucester City here whose wife is Vietnamese, and her father is a retired colonel in the North Vietnamese Army and moved to Ho Chi Minh City, now being called Saigon again. It's interesting how all of this has evolved because the one thing that people in southern Vietnam want to be is more like us--sometimes, I think they ought to think carefully about that--but want to be more like us with our materialism and everything else. Then, they're willing to throw over their own culture, their own history, and that's not a good idea. We talked years ago about peoples who had histories and those who didn't. Peoples who had histories are usually the societies that survive better and adapt better to stresses and to changing circumstances. Giving up what's a thousand years of your own history has a lot of down results. I just wonder where these kinds of things eventually lead and where we go to.

KR: Take me through your Air Force ROTC career at Rutgers. What was the training like? What did you do in the summer? Tell me about your ascent in leadership positions.

GF: Well, the training was every Wednesday afternoon over in Buccleuch Park, and we had military formations, marching and so forth. We had the opportunity to do physical competitions that every once in a while would be organized, the opportunity to do things like climbing ropes and climbing walls and maybe put out the famous automobile tires and you could run among the tires, the same kind of thing that we did for football to increase our agility and whatever. These were run as competition events, who could do best, who could get the best time and that sort of thing.

We really didn't have any kind of a summer commitment until the summer preceding my last year, and I did what was the officer basic summer camp at Otis Air Force Base in Cape Cod, which most people said, "You didn't do anything. Training? You just went to the beach, and Cape Cod no less." I said, "Well, we did some of that too." [laughter] But that was all physical. You know, I got the worst sunburn of my life up on Cape Cod. [laughter]

A buddy of mine, a guy who was from Syracuse, his family lived on the Cape. When they let us out for one or two weekends, we'd go over to his house and spend the weekend. The beach was two blocks away, and this was really great. What did we do? We did the same kinds of things that we had done back in the park in New Brunswick, some physical activities. Mostly, it was designed as a team-building, bonding kind of an experience. That has a lot of benefits from the standpoint of building teamwork, knowing how to build teamwork, teaching the basic fundamentals of leadership. From that standpoint, it was worthwhile. I actually took one weekend and went up to Provincetown and prowled around. It was really a very interesting time.

My ascent to leadership was the second semester of my fourth year, I became the cadet squadron commander. Then, the first semester of my last year, I was appointed the drill master for the entire Air Force Corps. The second semester, I was the cadet commander for the entire corps. Those were interesting, stressful days, totally unexpected activities. I became involved in things that I would never, a year before, have even dreamed that I'd be involved. It was different, really different.

KR: Why was it stressful and different?

GF: When the takeover of Old Queens happened, Mike Freeman and I--Mike was the Army cadet commander--learned that there was a meeting being held in Edison at one of the veteran's organization halls. There were several hundred members of the veteran's organization who were assembling, and the announced intent was to take back Old Queens. Mike and I said, "This has all the potential of turning into a disaster." So, we took it upon ourselves to go over there to talk to these people, and they had come up with "torches and pitchforks" and more serious hardware. They had every intention of storming the place. But the thing that was very obvious to us is that most of the law enforcement who was scattered around here weren't going to lift a finger or two to prevent it. We were very firmly of the opinion that Dr. Gross was doing a good job of handling this and keeping it from getting it out of hand, people getting hurt. So, we speechified for a while, walked around and talked to people and whatever. Eventually, they decided, well, maybe they'd let constituted authority and the president of the university actually do something. He carried it off, I thought, pretty decently. [Editor's Note: Michael O. Freeman graduated in the Rutgers College Class of 1970. Following President Richard Nixon's expansion of the Vietnam War to Cambodia, a nationwide student strike commenced in the beginning of May 1970. The strike began at Rutgers on Friday, May 1. On Monday, May 4, two thousand protesters gathered on the Old Queens Campus, and Rutgers President Mason Gross addressed the crowd, calling the protesters his guests. That day, two hundred students occupied the second and third floors of Old Queens, including Gross' office, resulting in a two-day sit-in of Old Queens. On May 4 in Ohio, National Guardsmen opened fire on anti-war protesters and bystanders at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine. In solidarity with the National Strike, the Rutgers College faculty voted on Tuesday, May 5 to make classes and final exams optional and instituted pass/fail grades for the spring semester 1970. On May 5, massive demonstrations continued at Rutgers, and protests and counter-protests continued for several weeks at Rutgers and on campuses across the nation. On May 14 and 15, 1970, students at Jackson State College protesting against racial harassment were fired upon by state and city police, resulting in two deaths and a dozen injuries. (From Paul Clemens' *Rutgers Since 1945*; Kent State University Libraries, Campus Strike Papers: New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1970)]

As I said earlier, there were people in the university, members of faculty, who actively worked to undermine Gross, two in particular that I remember, one of whom, I remember, his first name was George. They were both professors at the Ag School that became Cook, both older. They had a meeting at the alumni office, and they were friends with Vince Kramer, who was the alumni director for New Brunswick at the time. Both of them had very extensive contacts in the state legislature. Cook, of course, has a separate constituency with that, and they were working very hard with their constituency in the state legislature to undermine whatever was being done. I don't think that that was ever obvious to most people. Of course, all the actors in that are now

gone. I was really surprised, maybe shocked, maybe naïve, that this sort of thing would go on. I would've expected that the faculty would have kind of banded together to do the things that were best for the wellbeing of everybody involved. I discovered that that was not the case, that there were wide cleavages in the opinion on the faculty. [Editor's Note: The person to whom Mr. Fricks is referring could be George Van Der Noot, AG '37, GSNB '41, who served as a professor at the College of Agriculture and then later as the president of the Cook/College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences Alumni Association. Vincent Kramer, RC '41, served as an officer in the Marine Corps during World War II and continued his military career after the war. After his retirement in 1964, he became executive secretary and director of the Rutgers Alumni Association until 1987. His oral history is available on the Rutgers Oral History Archives website.]

We organized a march down College Avenue one day in the afternoon to support ROTC, not to speak to the issue of the occupation or of what was going on in Southeast Asia or anything else. Our focus was ROTC, and it was a very localized kind of focus. So, we ended up with, I think, five or six hundred people. There were rumors that the folks from Old Queens wanted to come out and attack us and so on and so forth. They had the campus patrol as security, back in the days when they really weren't a police force but more a group of night watchmen. Even that came off well, but that did show that there was a sizable constituency who saw some benefit in our activities. Many of them had very decided anti-feelings toward the folks in Old Queens. So, it was a very interesting development. Again, I'm not sure that very many people paid much attention to what happened, and then what it meant. [Editor's Note: "Folks from Old Queens" refers to student protesters who were occupying the Old Queens campus and building on May 4-5, 1970.]

KR: What anti-ROTC protest did you experience?

GF: Well, we had field day in the stadium in very early March, and there were a bunch of people who came and some of whom came out on the field and tried to disrupt the various activities. We were doing things like demonstration of field craft and activities that we had been learning and activities that were just demonstrations of kinds of things and proficiency in physical activities and then whatever. So, they came out wanting to disrupt what we were doing. Then, we did a formal parade I guess in the latter part of May, and they were there as well. Now, we had lots of people in the stands at the stadium, parents and friends and so forth, and some of these guys came out and they physically attacked two or three of the guys who were in formation on the field. Then, when we did our parade, pass in review, they tried to disrupt that as well, and that provoked a reaction from the State Police, who were providing security. So, they were shooed off and out of the stadium. So, those were probably the most graphic, anti-ROTC activities. They didn't obviously give any consideration to our point of view. We were certainly willing to at least accord them respect for their viewpoints. There wasn't any reciprocity with us.

KR: Was it very much on your radar, at the time, that there were faculty and students trying to eliminate ROTC at Rutgers altogether?

GF: Oh, yes. A lot of that activity had been ongoing for two or three years. It only kind of gained enough of a head of steam to really result in any kind of activity in 1970. [Editor's Note:

On Tuesday, May 5, when the Rutgers College faculty voted to back the strike and suspend the semester, the faculty also passed a resolution to admit no new students into ROTC in the 1970-1971 school year. A campaign commenced to keep ROTC on campus, led by the Ad Hoc Committee to Preserve ROTC. On May 14, 1970, the Board of Governors voted to retain ROTC. Then, the Rutgers faculty voted to take away credit for ROTC classes and shift responsibility for teaching military history from the Department of Military Science to the Department of History.]

KR: I am going to circle back later to talk more about the spring of 1970. I just want to ask you a few more things about ROTC and related activities.

GF: Okay.

KR: You were a member of the Arnold Air Society. Why did you join that? What did you do?

GF: The Arnold Air Society was the honors society for Air Force ROTC, and it was not something that I joined. It was something I was invited; it's an invitational thing. This basis was grade point average, performance, the usual kind of things that result in being invited to join an honors society.

KR: Is there anything that sticks out about the Arnold Air Society?

GF: We ran a dance every year. There was a counterpart group for the Army ROTC. We were mostly a social activity. When I got to be a member of the history honors society, I found out that there were enormous similarities. [laughter] We kind of did most of the same kinds of activities. At one point, I had thought about, "Gee, maybe we could do something together." I'm not sure how that would've gone down, but since we're running these social activities, we could probably do it more efficiently and more cost effectively [laughter] if we could combine our resources and combine our forces. It was a fun kind of a thing to do. You got recognized once a year for being a member, that sort of thing. Unlike the history honors society, Arnold Air didn't collect dues. I'm not sure who paid for what we did. That was, I guess, maybe a consideration for people continuing to stay in membership.

KR: What did you do for fun?

GF: What did I do for fun? Well, let's see. At one point, I had jumped out of an airplane. Who is now my wife was into parachuting. Well, she had had five jumps, and so I was challenged to undertake it. It's actually a pretty exhilarating experience. In the Air Force, we had an expression or saying that, "Why would you want to jump out of a perfectly good airplane?" If you had to, okay, but why would you want to? [laughter] But there were people who really got into that sort of thing.

What else did we do? Well, we had parties at the fraternity house and sometimes would journey into wild drunken revels. I'm sure you've never been to one of those kinds of things. There was loud music. We had a bar in the basement of the fraternity house, and we had one of the larger beer dispensing operations on campus. [laughter] But, of course, it was all hidden, and nobody

knew anything about it. Of course, those are the kinds of things that we did, but most of us were so immersed in school. If you had an opportunity to have a big social life, it usually meant that you had a degree program in English literature or something else that was equally nebulous; [laughter] you're studying philosophy or sociology.

Most of us who were in the engineering program didn't have a whole lot of free time. What was interesting is, when I started, there were something like forty guys who signed up for the dual-degree program. There were six of us who graduated, and I was the only one to pursue a liberal arts degree. Two or three others pursued degrees in business, and then there was a general liberal arts course, you got a bachelor's in general studies, it was called. It was mostly the introductory, the two-hundred level liberal arts stuff, most of which you had to take anyway. Those guys, they didn't seem to have quite the level of intensity that we had. You take three semesters of thermodynamics and three semesters of physics and four semesters of calculus [Editor's note: Mr. Fricks makes a sighing sound], it tires the mind.

KR: Are there any memorable professors from your engineering side of things?

GD: David G. Briggs became my engineering advisor, and he was my thermodynamics and heat transfer professor. George Melik, who I actually worked with later in my career, became the associate dean of engineering; he taught heat transfer and gas dynamics. Skip Fletcher, who eventually went on to become, after one or two permutations, the dean of Texas A&M, taught aerodynamics. [Editor's Note: Leroy "Skip" Fletcher served as a professor and associate dean at Rutgers from 1968 to 1975. In 1980, he became a professor and associate dean of engineering at his alma mater, Texas A&M, and served as a long-time professor there. In 1999, he became the director of the Aerospace Directorate at the NASA-Ames Research Center. He also served a term as president of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.]

Let's see, there was Byron Phelan, who was the only non-Ph.D. in the engineering faculty. He had been a member of the faculty for probably three decades. The dean of the engineering school Elmer Easton, who we always thought he was 110 years old, was somewhat of a character. He would show up at the annual engineering picnic in his Boy Scout Scoutmaster uniform, including the shorts and the big, round, floppy hat and whatever. The reason for that is that the morning of the picnic, there was always some kind of a scout activity. So, he would come from that over to the picnic, which was held up in the Heights Campus, the Busch Campus, up there in Piscataway, back when there was a whole lot more open space to do that kind of thing. Those were some of the people. [Editor's Note: Elmer C. Easton served as the dean of the College of Engineering from 1948 to 1974. His oral history can be found on the website of the Rutgers Oral History Archives. The Busch Campus at Rutgers was known as the University Heights Campus until 1971, when the campus was renamed in honor of donor Charles Busch.]

Dr. Dick Plano, who taught physics and then was a major force in the Physics Department, was well known. He had discovered an elementary particle, so he got his name in all the physics books. He did an experiment in class one time that caused a small explosion, and because I was sitting in the front row, I caught most of the shrapnel from the explosion. It actually knocked me out of my chair. He said, "Are you all right? Are you all right?" "Yes, sure, you know. I've got all this black stuff all over my shirt." [laughter] It hit me in the head with this piece of metal. He

was very apologetic. These were all great people and characters. I finally learned quantum mechanics. It was fun. It was interesting. It was stimulating, very stressful.

KR: You talked about some of the history professors that you had, such as Charanis and McCormick. What stories do you have of your history professors?

GF: Charanis liked to tell jokes and stories based upon the ancient historians. One of his favorites was Polybius, who I guess was the late Roman Republic or early empire. Of course, then later, Justinian was the emperor and his wife Theodora had been a hooker before he married her. So, he would get up and he would make like he was Theodora and all kinds of scurrilous remarks, accompanied all kind of hysterical hand motions and everything else. [laughter] You couldn't get away with doing this kind of thing today, or maybe you could. I don't know. This is the kind of stuff that he did. [Editor's Note: Polybius was a Greek historian of the Hellenistic Period.]

We had one, Traian Stoianovich. Traian, I don't know if you ever--is that a name you recognize? Traian was something of a, I don't know, he was having an affair with one of the female graduate students. The thing is that on the graduate side of the History Department, we had both men and women, but as an undergrad, it was all men because women had their own program over at Douglass. He was very indiscreet about his affair, and he was the talk of not only the faculty members but of the students. I don't know. Maybe we were all being Puritans or something, but we just thought that it was not quite kosher that he would engage in that kind of activity. My wife has a niece, who went to do graduate work in history at Rutgers, and I guess Stoianovich was still there and he tried to put a make on her. So, obviously, having affairs with graduate students was something that he apparently did with some frequency. She would have no part of it. Being an ardent feminist, she put him in his place. My reaction was, "Good for you." I don't know, do things like that go on today? I can't believe that they could.

KR: I think they are kept really quiet if they do go on now. Shockingly, University Human Resources just yesterday issued a policy that has outlawed relationships like these between faculty and graduate students. In 2020, it has finally become a policy that is outlawed. [Editor's Note: The Policy on Consensual Relationships in Academic Settings went into effect at Rutgers University on June 2, 2020.]

GF: Well, that's good. It should have been a policy in 1960 or 1965. Having worked as a supervisor, as a manager, and whatever, I know that those kinds of things in any organization can be very debilitating. They usually end up in a bad way. At the very least, people could be hurt by it. They could be hurt not only emotionally but also career wise and so forth. That stuff, you make the point that it's not permitted. One outfit that I worked with, just six or seven years ago had a policy, if you were going to have a relationship with another member of the staff, you'd better go find someplace else to work. I don't know if the university's gone quite to that extent.

When I was a member of the--well, I still am a member of the alumni association--but I guess this was twenty years ago, I was placed on a task force to reassess the university's expense reimbursement policy. That's when I found out that the university didn't have one. I said, "If somebody goes off to a conference and they come back and they have all these expenses, how

are they reimbursed?" "Well, they just come in and fill out a voucher." I said, "Are there any guidelines as to what's allowed or not?" "Well, it's up to the department chair." I said, "Oh, so if I am in a generous department, I could come in and I'd stay at the Ritz-Carlton in Manhattan and then eat at 21 [Club] every night and all, and the department would pay it right up." One of the ladies in the alumni affairs office, says, "Yes, that's right." I said, "If you were in a penurious department, you were going to stay at Days Inn or at the Red Roof or something and you were going to eat at the Bob Evans, you were going to buy regular gas instead of the supreme." "Yes, that's about right." "There are no guidelines to any of that?" "No, it's basically whatever you can get away with." When I made my report to the president of the university, I said, "This is the only place I have ever been, particularly an organization of this size, where there doesn't appear to be any control whatsoever." He didn't seem to be too awfully concerned. I later figured out, well, maybe this was to his advantage because he was staying in the Ritz-Carlton. [laughter] It was just a fascinating kind of thing. Yes, the university has been, shall we say, Neanderthal with coming up with policies. [laughter]

KR: What was your interaction like with Professor McCormick?

GF: I idolized the guy. I thought he walked on water, which was interesting because his son, our former president, at least when we were undergrads--I met him when he was a freshman going off to Amherst and I was a freshman there at Rutgers--I got the impression that he and his dad didn't get along. It was only, I think, much later that he changed his point of view. A lot of people are like that. My stepfather said he thought that, in my eyes, he was an idiot until I got to be twenty-five years old and then suddenly realized that maybe there was some enduring benefit of being in the same house. [laughter] I thought that Professor McCormick was really a great guy. I mean, he had his faults and foibles, like anybody. I just thought that he was a great guy.

KR: You said before you had Warren Susman also as a professor.

GF: Unfortunately. I have a very negative view of Warren Susman. I think he was the biggest hypocrite I've ever met, and I'll tell you why. I had a good friend, Ernie, Ernie Basiano, who was a grad student. He had been called to Susman's office at one point, and I walked over with him. I stood outside the office, but I heard Susman say to Ernie, "You will toe the line or I will see to it that you never get your degree." Ernie was a very outspoken guy. He didn't cotton to an awful lot of Susman's political philosophy and his protolyzing in the classroom. Here was Susman, in his public pronouncements, he was very much the academic freedom guy and all this sort of thing. He really showed his colors in this particular instance. I completely lost any respect for the man at that point. When he was appointed the leader of the task force that came up with the Rutgers College, Douglass College, Livingston College thing, I wondered what motivated this. I would never have given any consideration to him, from an administrator viewpoint. The fact that eventually, Dick McCormick, abandoned that particular model, I think, was finally a recognition that the system was untenable. The fact that you were running degree programs in three or four different places with different requirements just somehow didn't make a lot of sense, and Susman was responsible for all of this. My personal antipathy for the guy also, I guess, was buttressed by a lack of professional regard. He is probably the only real blemish of my memories of Rutgers. [Editor's Note: Warren Susman served as a history professor at Rutgers from 1960 to 1985. He died of a heart attack while addressing the national convention

of the Organization of American Historians in Minneapolis. In 1968, Susman produced a report entitled *The Reconstruction of an American College*, which came to be known as the "Susman Report" and called for the rethinking of higher education and a restructuring of the undergraduate degree. In 2007, the undergraduate colleges of Rutgers University--Rutgers College, Douglass College, University College, Cook College and Livingston College--were merged into the School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences.]

KR: Gene, I am curious, were there any Douglass students in your engineering courses?

GF: Yes. One of the women who I went through grammar school and high school ends up--there were six of us from Lincoln in '65 who ended up at Rutgers--Sue Gillen enrolled in the four-year electrical engineering course. Rich Mikulak, I think he finally ended up in business sociology. Carmen Sita ended up in bio-sci. Bruce Nemirow was in something. Joan Clapp, I think she was an English major and ended up as a schoolteacher. Bruce and Joan had been an item in high school and ended up getting married while we were in school. But, yes, this was a crowd. It was funny. I always thought that Susan was a much better student than I was and probably a lot smarter, but she had unbelievable difficulty in chemistry and failed the course. So, she did summer makeup, got it back, but then she decided she was going to drop out of engineering and become a math major. So, our sophomore year, she did what she did. Then, she decided that she was going to drop out of that and become an art history major, and she did that. At the end of third year, she decided she was going to become an art major. She came to the end of the first semester, and she dropped out of school altogether and got a job as a secretary in New York. I thought this was a tragedy. It was mostly a case of she had just run out of gas and had run into obstacles and then wasn't able to get through with it. Joan, I didn't have any classes with her because she was pretty much confined over to the Douglass campus, but she had a very successful career in school and stayed married, has been married now, I guess, fifty or fifty-one years, and has several children and so forth. In fact, I think she and Bruce have a granddaughter who's at Douglass. It's just kind of interesting. Carmen, who, as I said, graduated with a degree in bio-sci; after he graduated, he joined the seminary and became a priest. He's kind of disappeared from things.

I have other classmates who didn't go to Rutgers and probably would've done well if they had. I'll tell you about one, just because it's kind of funny. Marc Werner ended up, I think, at the University of Florida and graduated and goes into business. He's pretty successful for a number of years, marries "Zaza," one of our Lincoln classmates, who also went to Florida. He now has moved to Jerusalem, and he owns the string of refueling stations along the major highway in Israel. Now, the way it works is each of these stations dispenses automobile batteries for electric cars. He has a solar farm for each station. So, you pull in and you've got to be able to do a refueling in the same amount of time you would do gasoline in order to be successful. So, the cars are built such that you can pull a battery out and put a new battery in and hook it up and be on your way in five to seven minutes. So, Marc owns all the batteries. He's got all these stations and he's making a fortune. [laughter] I say, "Some guys just have all the luck." We trade emails back and forth every couple of weeks, and come holidays in December, he sends me a Chanukah card and I send him a Christmas card. [laughter] It's a good deal, but he would've done well if he had come to Rutgers, I'm sure.

KR: On your pre-interview survey, it says that you got married in 1968.

GF: Right.

KR: How did you meet your wife?

GF: She was the girlfriend of one of my fraternity brothers, and I stole her away. I mean, that's basically it. Actually, I invited her to the Military Ball, which was the social event that the Arnold Air Society was responsible for. So, I picked her up, she lived in Bound Brook, and proceeded over to what became the Livingston campus, but before Livingston existed, and I got us impossibly lost. We ended going out the back exit from what became Livingston and ended up over in Middlesex, New Jersey. She said that she was convinced that I was playing a trick on her and that I was going to take her home and drop her off and then she was going to kill me. [laughter] I said, "No, I'm genuinely lost." I had never been in Edison, never been to Middlesex or whatever. So, I finally got back to New Brunswick and I went to the campus patrol office, which, at the time, was located right off of College Avenue, and they drew me a map. So, I went back across the bridge--and this is before the Route 18 bridge was built--this was the Landing Lane Bridge. So, I drove over and finally found the place. We walked in an hour late, but she figured that I was resourceful enough to recover from this that maybe I wasn't hopeless after all.

KR: What was that like for you, being a student and balancing your course of study, doing your military training, and then also being in a young marriage?

GF: It was exciting. It made me a much better time manager and organizer, really, really much better. So, yes, those were interesting times.

KR: We have been going today for two hours and ten minutes. Your voice sounds good, but I do not want to tax you too much. Should we conclude for today and pick up again tomorrow?

GF: Sure.

KR: Okay, that sounds great. Is eleven AM okay for you tomorrow?

GF: I think so, but let me look at the book. Let's see, tomorrow, I've got you in my book for 11 AM tomorrow, so you're on. I've also reserved space on Thursday the 18th if it becomes necessary. I do have a doctor's appointment on Thursday morning at 8:45, but if you want to do it at eleven on Thursday if we need the time, I should be back and then that would work out.

KR: Sure, that sounds great.

GF: Yes.

KR: Thank you so much for doing this oral history interview.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

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